

Muslims hurt by Pope's remarks on Islam

NSI-16/9/2006



The Pope has been called to apologise for his comments

JAKARTA: Pope Benedict's comments about Islam could hurt global religious harmony, government and religious leaders in Muslim countries said yesterday.

A growing chorus of Muslim leaders have called on the Pope to apologise for the remarks he made in a speech in Germany on Tuesday when he used the terms "jihad" and "holy war".

Pakistan's National Assembly, Parliament's lower house, unanimously passed a resolution condemning the Pope's comments.

"This statement has hurt sentiments of the Muslims," the resolution said. "This is also against the charter of the United Nations. This house demands the Pope retract his remarks

in the interest of harmony among different religions of the world."

Islamic scholars say the Pontiff's comments show how little he understands Islam and some have said Islamic countries should threaten to break off relations with the Vatican.

The Vatican issued a statement to say the Pope had never meant to offend Islam.

In his speech at the University of Regensburg, Benedict quoted from a book recounting a conversation between 14th century Byzantine Christian Emperor Manuel Paleologos II and a Persian scholar on the truths of Christianity and Islam.

The pope implicitly denounced connections between Islam and violence, particularly with regard to ji-

had, or "holy war".

Benedict repeatedly quoted Manuel's argument that spreading the faith through violence was unreasonable, adding: "Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul."

The reaction was swift.

"It is obvious from the statements that the Pope doesn't have a correct understanding of Islam," said Din Syamsuddin, chairman of Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia.

He said the remarks could hurt "harmonious" relations between Muslims and Catholics and urged Muslims against reacting excessively.

Fauzan Al-Anshori, spokesman for the radical Indonesian Mu-

jahideen Council, said the Pope misunderstood Islam and jihad and challenged him to a dialogue.

"Muslims can't eliminate jihad from the Islamic discourse, the same way Christians can't do away with the doctrine of Trinity," he said.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said he was worried the Pope's statements might upset efforts to bring about a rapprochement between West and East.

"He (Aboul Gheit) said he looked forward to intensifying efforts to strengthen the dialogue between civilisations and religions and to avoid anything that is likely to exacerbate confessional and ideological differences," an Egyptian foreign ministry statement said. — Reuters